



Unreinforced Masonry Policy Committee Meeting

Meeting Summary

City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 4050, 700 5th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104

Thursday, March 13, 2014 – 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Attendance

Committee Members

- Lynda Carey, Bellwether Housing
- David Gonzalez, Degenkolb Engineers
- Mark Huppert, Preservation Green Lab
- Paul Mar, SCID Preservation and Development Authority
- Sean Martin, Rental Housing Association
- Michale Robinson, A.I.D. Development Group
- Lara Simmons, Structural Engineer
- Ryan Smith, Martin Smith Inc

- Craig Weaver, USGS
- Bryan Zagers, Coughlin Porter Lundeen

Staff & Presenters

- Landon Bosisio, EnviroIssues
- John Gibson, Gibson Economics
- Sandy Howard, DPD
- Steve Moddemeyer, Collins Woerman
- John Siu, DPD
- Maureen Traxler, DPD
- Angie Thomson, Facilitator, EnviroIssues

Welcome and Introductions

After a round of introductions, Angie Thomson, EnviroIssues, reviewed the agenda. Steve Moddemeyer and John Gibson have been asked to present the benefit-cost analysis they conducted for a mandatory retrofit for all URM buildings in Seattle. The committee will then review potential topics for further discussion at future committee meetings.

Sandy Howard, DPD, recapped the City's outreach program since the policy committee last met in October 2012. DPD and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) conducted a pilot program in Columbia City to inform URM building owners about the potential retrofit policy. The program used non-traditional outreach techniques, with the help of a Department of Neighborhoods (DON) outreach liaison to reach those who are not usually engaged by the City. An evaluation report of the pilot outreach program will be posted on the URM website.

Sandy summarized the themes heard from the public:

- The cost of the retrofit is the predominant concern
- The size and frequency of Seattle's earthquakes is not enough to warrant a URM retrofit policy.

- Questions about whether buildings that have already been retrofitted will need to be retrofitted again.
- Concerns that commercial tenants' rent will increase.
- The City's other initiatives (potential minimum wage increase, sick leave policy) are already threatening small businesses.
- Policy needs to include criteria for preserving community character in the City's neighborhoods.
- Incentives are a better policy tool than regulation.
- Building owners would like a reduction in DPD permit fees and review time.
- DON's scope of work may significantly increase if URM retrofits are required.

Craig Weaver, USGS, asked how representative Columbia City is of the rest of Seattle. Sandy answered that Columbia City is very different from the rest of the city, but the neighborhood has a diverse community with a variety of different building owners. The purpose of the pilot was to test communication methods for various audiences. A member of the public asked if DPD has contacted all URM building owners and tenants identified as part of the City's windshield survey list of URM buildings. Sandy responded that the City sent a letter to all URM building owners in July 2012 informing them of the policy, but did not contact tenants of the buildings.

Benefit-Cost Analysis of URM Retrofit Policy

Steve Moddenmeyer, Collins Woerman, and John Gibson, Gibson Economics, presented to the group the results of their benefit-cost analysis on the URM retrofit policy. The results are meant to inform the City's policymakers, not to advocate for a specific policy action.

The benefit-cost analysis presentation can be found on the policy website.

Bill Steele, University of Washington, pointed out that the number of deaths predicted by the benefit-cost analysis model does not take into account the longer duration of shaking that may come with a Cascadia-level earthquake. Craig responded that the model is a reasonable starting point as there is not enough data on earthquakes of that kind.

A member of the public asked why the City should implement the policy if Seattle is due for a large earthquake that could cause significant damage. Steve answered that the model shows the Bolts Plus program would likely reduce the number of deaths within Seattle's URM buildings by 90%. Another member of the public asked if Seattle could be impacted by a tsunami from an off-shore earthquake. Craig answered that a tsunami would likely lose much of its velocity once it reaches Seattle due to the curvature of Puget Sound.

Policy Committee Discussion

Angie thanked Steve and John for the presentation and asked the committee to provide first

impressions and ideas for further committee discussion. Mark Huppert, Preservation Green Lab, commented that the analysis paints a picture of what many URM building owners are facing. One of the challenges of a mandatory retrofit policy would be if URM buildings are required to meet the existing building code in addition to meeting the policy's requirements.

Craig asked what percentage of the 929 identified URM buildings is designated as historic. John answered that approximately 130 have a historic designation. A community member noted that many building owners do not want a historic designation as it can tie their hands for future development. Craig asked if the analysis used the Nisqually earthquake as a marker to measure building damage. Steve responded that the analysis used the HAZUS model because separating the damage costs to URM buildings from all of Seattle's building stock would be difficult. John added that approximately 20 URM buildings suffered significant structural damage as a result of the Nisqually earthquake.

Lara Simmons, structural engineer, noted that a large earthquake could happen tomorrow. The committee should continue to think about the long-term implications an earthquake could have on Seattle's communities, even after recovery efforts. She added that in New Zealand, after the 2011 earthquake, entire neighborhoods were reduced to vacant lots. Mark agreed, saying that according to the benefit-cost analysis, Bolts Plus could have a dramatic impact on life and building safety.

Ryan Smith, Martin Smith Inc, noted that the policy needs to be closely tied to various financing options. Since the public as a whole is benefiting as result of the retrofits, it isn't fair for private building owners to bear the whole cost of the policy. It's also not fair to ask the public to pay for the retrofits of privately-owned URM buildings. Lynda Carey, Bellwether Housing, added that if the policy is a mandate, the City needs to look at incentives for building owners. She asked what the public cost would be for the City to clean up and recover after an earthquake event. John answered that it is difficult to extract the specific cost of URM as part of a region-wide recovery effort.

Paul Mar, SCID Preservation and Development Authority, praised the benefit-cost analysis and mentioned that the City and policy committee need to distill the analysis's information down in order to effectively communicate it with individual building owners. Mark posed the idea of lobbying for a state tax credit to match the federal tax credit for historic preservation, which is common for eastern states. This would provide URM building owners with another funding tool to hopefully reduce the financial burden of a retrofit. Lara suggested using case studies of previous committees who have implemented similar policies.

A member of the public commented that he owns buildings in the Georgetown neighborhood and supplies low rents for commercial and residential spaces. He added that the cost of some building retrofits are expected to be more than the value of the building itself. Another member of the public noted that if the policy is important for public safety, then the City needs a funding mechanism, such as a city-wide levy. Otherwise, the policy will not work economically, particularly if retrofits cost \$40 a square foot, as discussed in the benefit-cost analysis. Lynda commented that the analysis was great because it proved that the Bolts Plus retrofit program would allow URM building tenants to safely exit the structure after an earthquake event.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Angie reviewed the policy committee's next steps. The committee will reconvene on March 24, from 8:30 – 10:30 a.m., to further discuss the benefit-cost analysis and review the policy committee's previous recommendations for a mandatory URM building retrofit. The committee will also look at issues raised by the public, including financing and incentives.

Action Items for DPD:

- Upload the benefit-cost analysis and presentation to the policy website.

Angie thanked committee members and meeting attendees for their participation.